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ABSTRACT

This Brief examines England's policy changes in the 1980s, which closely resemble those in the United States. England established national standards, school choice, national assessments, new types of public schools, and decision-making authority in individual schools. Part 1 provides the background to England's reforms, including its successes and problems. Part 2 explains the standards and accountability aspects of the reforms. Part 3 analyzes school competition and privatization. Part 4 offers the study's conclusions. Effective school reforms need ample time to be drafted, piloted, and implemented. Haste can be counterproductive. Policies need to be reviewed, evaluated, and revised. Financial delegation to individual schools is effective. School improvement is the responsibility of large-scale willingness to think outside the box and to welcome changes in perception among all stakeholders. Effective school-improvement policies may include comprehensive whole-school evaluation and strategic planning, in addition to state standards and student assessments. Policies should be based on good research rather than on political expediency or ideology. Forging policies while involving all stakeholders may seem inefficient in the short term but more expedient in the long term, since everyone feels invested in the policy and its success. (Contains 16 references.) (RKJ)

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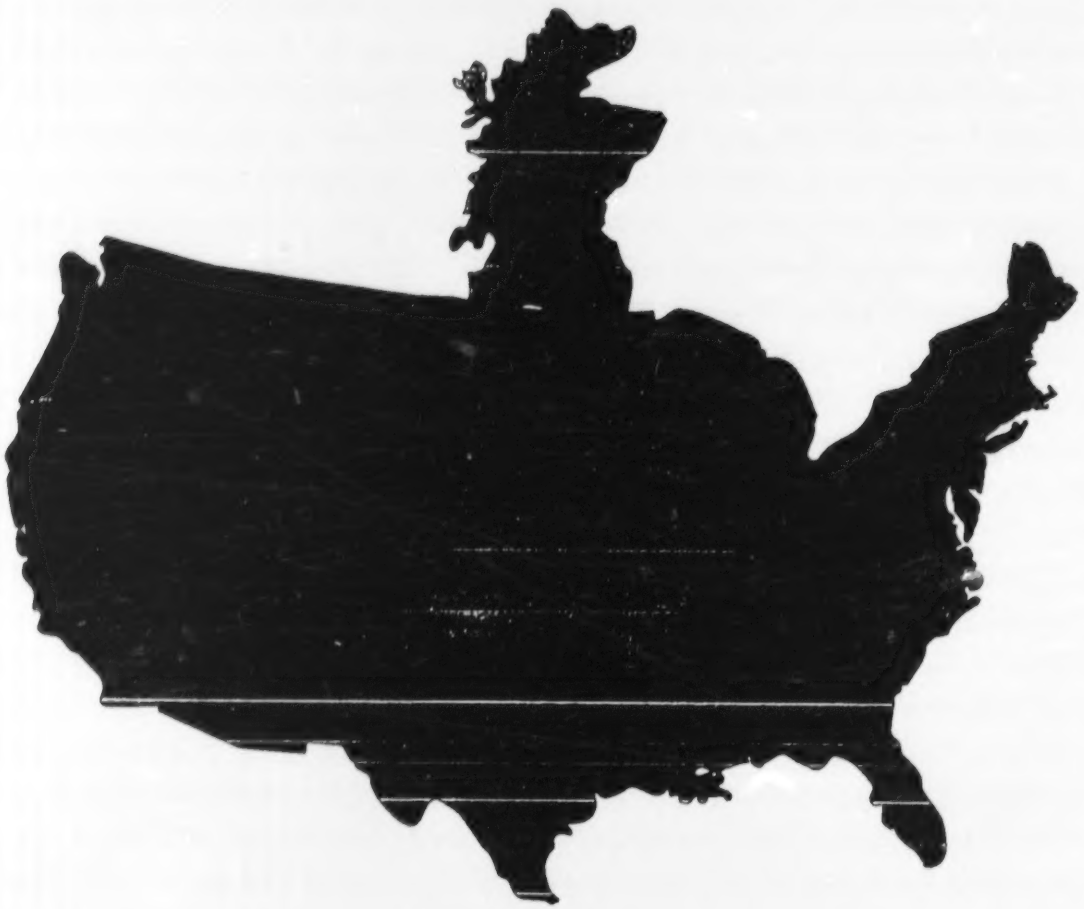
Public Schools, Private Prospects

Lessons from English School Reform



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Issues in Brief

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Public Schools, Private Prospects

Lessons from English School Reform

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National Association of State Boards of Education

January 1998

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Part I. Introduction

There is nothing new about studying other people's systems and institutions in the hopes of bringing something useful home, and there often is something intrinsically valuable about it. Today issues, and solutions, confronting state boards of education continue to recur across the globe. One doesn't need to look too long at the international press to notice that experiments in school choice are operating in The Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand. Voucher schemes are popular in England and The Netherlands. Several other countries are developing national or regional assessment programs; at least a dozen countries are debating "standards of performance" for students, teachers or schools; and dozens of countries have had headline stories in leading newspapers about the ramifications of their country's results on the Third International Mathematics and Science Study.

However, it is in England[1] where the greatest number of education policy issues of interest to U.S. policymakers converge. In the 1980s, the English Parliament tried to make schools more efficient, more effective and more responsive to their communities by establishing national standards, implementing school choice, creating national assessments, developing a variety of new types of public schools, and shifting decisionmaking authority away from district offices and to individual schools. English school reforms provide insights for U.S. policymakers not only because they closely resemble those in the U.S., however, but also because England resembles the United States in other critical contextual ways: England has a tradition of decentralized school policymaking; England has depended on an industrial economy to support public services; England is a representative democracy; England is growing increasingly multicultural; and England is struggling to contend with low standards, infrastructure decay, and the needs of their economy through wide sweeping school reform.

> *"The practical value of studying in a right spirit and with scholarly accuracy the working of foreign systems of education is that it will result in our being better fitted to study and understand our own."*
>
> Michael Sadler, 1900.

This Brief focuses on two key components of education reform: 1) standards and accountability and 2) choice and privatization. It's purpose is not to suggest that English reforms should direct American school policy. What is right for England, of course, may not be right here. But since education reform policies in England bear striking resemblance to reforms across the U.S., learning about English reform is a promising way to increase our own understanding of states' efforts to improve schools.

Reforming Public Schools in England. Much like the United States, England has a tradition of decentralized education decisionmaking where until 1980 directives seeped rather disjointedly from the national education department. Local education authorities (akin to school districts in the U.S.) provided professional support and

[1] The education reforms discussed in this Issue Brief actually apply to schools in both England and Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland, while a part of the United Kingdom along with England and Wales, were not included in these reforms, although they have experienced similar reforms enacted through different legislation.

"It is really quite remarkable how similar the reform movements have been in the two countries (England and the United States)...the difference is, England actually followed through."

Terry Moe, 1994.
"The British Battle for Choice."

consolidated services and exercised considerable political and bureaucratic control over schools, and headteachers (akin to principals in the U.S.) determined the curricular and philosophical direction of individual schools. Also like the U.S., by the mid-1970s it was obvious to politicians and the general public that English schools were not producing students with the skills and knowledge demanded by business and industry. Many felt that schools in general were unresponsive to the needs of parents, communities and business.

Simultaneous to deteriorating public approval ratings of schools in England, the Conservative party won a majority in Parliament, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, and the new government embarked on a wide sweeping effort to improve the quality and efficiency of all public services through a multi-pronged approach of consumer choice, privatization of public institutions, and local decision-making. In education, Parliament fundamentally replaced an educator-dominated, decentralized school system with a nationally constructed education "marketplace" where school quality is secured through national standards, local community monitoring, and parents' ability to "vote with their feet" through a national system of school choice paired with per capita funding to reward schools for attracting parental "business." The radical reconstruction of English schools throughout the 1980s and 90s has brought forth unprecedented change in how schools are perceived and operated. Four of the most notable changes are examined in this Issue Brief.

- **English schools are now measured against an accountability system** that includes *national standards*, publicly reported *assessments* and an *external evaluation system* for schools;

- **English schools compete for students** under a *nationwide choice scheme* and funding formulas that direct money to schools based almost entirely on the number of students they attract;

- **English schools now are more diverse**, as *new types of schools* are established that have different student populations (for example, some are selective, single-sex, or religious), are organized differently (for example, some are operated by LEAs and others operate with funding from the national government), and have different missions (for example, some schools specialize in arts, science, classics, or foreign languages); and

- **English schools have been granted new, higher levels of autonomy** through massive *reorganization of decisionmaking power* (taking power from teachers and local government and redistributing it to parents, community representatives and businesses) and *delegation of entire operating budgets* for schools to spend as they choose.

In general, the process of reform in England has not been easy. Various practical and political difficulties, many unforseen, challenged almost every reform, causing some to be abandoned and others to be altered before they were implemented. But after almost twenty years of an entire nation responding to challenges, overcoming difficulties, fine-tuning policies and adjusting implementation plans, England has an abundance of experience in planning and administering comprehensive education reforms. The quality and amount of research, evaluation and debate that England's national experiment has generated is a treasure to all countries that continue to struggle with finding effective ways to build efficient, high-quality schools.

Part II. Standards and Accountability

As in many states across America, standards and accountability reforms in England have included setting knowledge and performance standards for students at key ages and developing assessments to measure the extent to which students meet the standards. In large part, the reasoning of Parliament was similar to that in many states. Too much curricular freedom, they contended, had led to a system with a curriculum so diffuse that it was impossible to measure the extent to which students at different schools received a high-quality education. There was also a justified fear among policymakers that many students were not receiving an adequate education, based upon educational and economic indicators:

- Variation in school quality left many students ill-prepared for higher education;
- In primary schools, literacy skills were generally low;
- Secondary schools were not producing enough well-educated, skilled workers who could solve problems and communicate effectively; and
- Achievement levels in England were generally lower than in other Western European countries.

Although everyone agreed that quality was a problem in English schools, without a common yardstick with which to measure "adequacy" the local and national governments found it difficult to intervene effectively. The Parliamentary response to this situation is one that will sound familiar to many state policymakers in the United States:

- Establish a *set of standards* that specifies what subjects students should study and roughly sketches the content of study in each subject area (while leaving lesson plans, textbooks, learning materials and sequence of study to local decisionmaking) and corresponding *attainment targets* that define the knowledge and skills that students should acquire by the key ages of seven, eleven, fourteen and sixteen;
- Establish *mechanisms to evaluate the achievement of students* near the end of each key age; and
- Devise *mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of schools* on criteria beyond test scores.

Establishing Standards and Attainment Targets

To ensure that all students got a high quality education to which they were entitled, the national government established a set of standards called the "National Curriculum" (NC). The NC framework "specifies the minimum to which children between ages 5 and 16 are entitled to be taught in ten subjects—11 subjects after age eleven" (British Council, 1996). It is supposed to be sufficiently flexible to encourage diversity to thrive while establishing and maintaining high expectations for students, teachers and schools.

Initial government action in establishing the NC was staggeringly rapid; a new government agency, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, was developed almost overnight to advise the Secretary of Education on standards and assessment and to oversee the creation of the NC. Within a year, three subjects—English, mathematics and science—were introduced in elementary schools. Seven other subjects—art, geography, history, modern languages, music, physical education, and technology—were slated to follow rapidly into elementary schools, as was

the introduction of all subjects in secondary schools.

But after a quick start, establishing the curriculum was no easy matter, and several difficulties became evident almost as soon as the first subject framework was released:

- First, extensive staff training had to be undertaken in a few short months, but because school governance and finance reforms were taking place simultaneously, divisions of responsibility for staff training were blurred. Local education authorities (LEAs) assumed most of the training burden, but were given few extra funds to do so and had very little time themselves to learn what implementing the NC would entail. As a result, the quality and amount of training available to teachers and administrators varied considerably across schools and LEAs.

- Second, shifting curriculum and standards away from schools and LEAs to the national government, and doing it quickly, sent seismic tremors among professional educators. Although educators generally agreed with the principle of national standards, there was little agreement about the exact content of the standards or the appropriate role of the national government in developing or administering the system. Vast powers given to the Secretary of Education to develop and revise the NC were met with general outrage by teachers and administrators.

- Third, components of the NC that were produced from 1988 to 1990 were not subject *frameworks*, as promised, but highly prescriptive instructions for teaching each subject. The government reasoned that having an assessment system to hold schools accountable for results made it imperative that policymakers define the exact content for which students would be held accountable. What developed was an NC with about 1,000 "statements of attainment" for students across subjects and across time. Teachers found that implementing such cumbersome standards was virtually impossible, and interpreting and studying complex NC documents took substantial hours away from their teaching.

- Also, the compulsion to produce the NC rapidly meant that serious pedagogical debates were left unresolved—questions, for example, of whether students should be required to memorize key works of poetry, whether English dialects should be allowed in the classroom, whether students should be allowed to use calculators, and what the ratio of European to non-European history should be.

- Furthermore, implementing the NC was costly for schools because it required most schools to purchase new materials to teach new topics, averaging about $300 per student above and beyond what schools normally expected to spend (National Union of Teachers, 1992). Implementing this curriculum at the same time that school budgets were being altered by new funding formulas caused disruptive budget shortfalls in many schools.

- Finally, specific requirements for each subject of the NC were developed by committees of subject specialists, university faculty, and government officials. Each committee worked in relative isolation. Excluding teachers from the process and isolating development teams led to a set of disjointed NC subject frameworks that: 1) did not lend themselves to the type of interdisciplinary work that was common in schools; and 2) when added together, contained so much information that covering the content of only a few subjects monopolized most of the day.

Because of these difficulties, much of the NC needed to be amended almost immediately. But frequently changing the standards made teachers' jobs even more difficult. After a rewrite of the curriculum in 1995, the government was com-

pelled by widespread anger among teachers and administrators to declare a moratorium on further changes for at least five years, so that educators could carefully implement the NC rather than respond to a barrage of annual changes.

The revised national curriculum is streamlined, focuses on English, math and science, and allows teachers significantly more time for their own lessons. Furthermore, the NC's rough start has compelled the government to work in *partnership* with teachers when devising future standards and assessments and to fill key positions on curricular advisory committees with public school teachers and administrators.

Preliminary Consequences of England's National Standards.

While it is still early to derive hard and fast conclusions, ten years after first implementing national standards, some effects are apparent.

Curriculum breadth is widening. In primary schools, there is evidence that the curriculum is more varied and diverse now than it was ten years ago, prior to implementing the NC; teachers had been concentrating on English, math, art, music, and physical education. Now, at least in part because of their high profile in initial efforts at creating national standards, science, social studies and technology are regularly included in an elementary student's day, even though they are no longer emphasized by the new NC.

Teaching is becoming more subject-specific. English schools, particularly elementary, have for decades used interdisciplinary teaching methods. However, the sheer breadth of the NC, paired with the subject-specific rather than interdisciplinary nature of the subject frameworks, appears to be encouraging teachers to use more traditional, subject-specific teaching methods at the expense of thematic, interdisciplinary studies.

There is tenuous evidence that test performance may be improving. Preliminary results from national tests in the elementary grades suggest that student performance is improving. However, some skeptics point out that improvements could occur because teachers and students are finally "settling in" to the standards and developing an understanding of what is expected of them on the associated tests.

Stark differences among schools continue to exist. Although the NC is envisioned as an "entitlement" for all students to be guaranteed exposure to a minimum core of knowledge, it does nothing itself to equalize the unevenly distributed capacity of schools to deliver the NC effectively and offer every student their "entitlement."

Overall, implementing the NC has been very politically divisive and has made it very difficult for teachers, during transition, to do their jobs well. Still, the general mood in England is supportive of a set of national standards, and there is good indication that the new national curriculum, written largely according to teachers' specifications, will succeed.

National Tests

Before the advent of the National Curriculum, standardized testing was very rare in England. Customarily, students were only given standardized tests when they left school, using essay and other performance assessments written by independent assessment boards to sort students for higher education. But reform legislation in the 1980s saw assessment as a tool to monitor standards associated with key ages across a student's school career. Students are now evaluated against targets set in the NC at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16.

The government made clear its intentions that the tests should be "high stakes." They were supposed to be used for a variety of purposes, including to monitor students' progress, help teachers provide targeted remediation, compare test performance among schools, and promote

accountability to the NC across the system. Assessment results were supposed to be the driving force behind the new education marketplace.

To devise the tests' structure, the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) was established. TGAT recommended tests that emulated a variety of "best practices" of the independent assessment boards, including essay questions, portfolios, and other types of performance assessment. TGAT, it is interesting to note, was struck by evidence that the American tendency to use multiple-choice tests was a primary cause of "dumbing down the curriculum." As a consequence, they recommended that few multiple choice questions be used in the assessments. TGAT also recommended a two-prong system:

- Younger students should be evaluated with continuous teacher-administered performance assessments that resembled classroom instruction and would be used for diagnosis and remediation.

- In later years, students should take one-shot standardized tests annually that would provide more accurate measures for school accountability purposes.

Finally, TGAT recommended that assessments be:

- Developed and tested over several years;

- Paired with extensive professional development to help teachers use assessment results;

- Accompanied by financial support for several years to help schools invest staff time in training and administering the exams; and

- Based upon an assessment process that respects teachers' professional judgements about students' abilities.

While TGAT's assessment model was thought by many to be expansive and forward thinking, it was also complex, time consuming to implement, and expensive. As a result, the national government ignored many of the more important recommendations of TGAT, such as the importance of a multi-year test development program and the need to help schools with the financial costs of administering national tests. The government also ignored TGAT's recommendation that aggregate exam scores for accountability purposes only be published for secondary schools, insisting that parents have a right to hold *all* schools accountable. The government also de-emphasized teacher-administered performance assessments and put most of their resources and efforts into developing standardized pencil-and-paper tests. With the demotion of teacher-led performance assessments, professional development for teachers also fell by the wayside, as tests were "teacher proofed" more than "teacher led."

"I think the government has got it all wrong when it comes to assessments. I mean, the attainment targets and levels and descriptions and the forms they fill out are all so complex. Parents don't want to know so much if their child can conjugate irregular verbs or factor decimal division in their heads. We want to know generally if our child is doing ok, if they are learning what they should and if the school we have chosen for them is appropriate to serve their needs."

Parent, Cherryvale Primary School, suburban London.

The few teacher-led performance exams that were implemented in primary schools, in 1991, turned into projects of epic proportions; with items to measure student performance according

to hundreds of attainment targets, administering the tests alone was estimated to take over 40 hours of classroom time (Gripps, 1993), and reporting and preparation gobbled up even more[2]. Parent volunteers and substitute teachers were brought into schools to keep order among the general classroom while teachers assessed students, often individually. At the end of the year, teachers reported that while the information generated by these tests was useful and the process of administering them interesting, they were finding it very difficult to implement a new and more extensive curriculum while committing arduous effort and inordinate time to student assessments. In addition, after the testing process was over teachers themselves had serious reservations about the government's intentions to publish aggregate data for school comparisons because they believed that comparability of scores across students and schools was jeopardized, since, although assessment tasks were standardized, testing situations were not.

The inevitability of having even more assessments to complete, as successive subjects from the NC were added to the docket, paired with an unprecedented level of record-keeping to document every student's attainment of every NC target, frustrated teachers on a national scale. Teachers felt so unable to do their jobs under the new system that in 1993 teachers across the country, with the overwhelming support of parents and headteachers, refused to administer the tests.

Such a large scale act of civil disobedience over a curriculum and assessment program was unparalleled. Although the government threatened to fire teachers and headteachers and replace school governors, they eventually capitulated to the overwhelming consensus against the national tests and reduced the breadth and depth of the NC, reduced the number of attainment targets that needed to be tested, and so reduced the testing load. The government also promised simpler standardized tests in place of the performance items in the elementary years, a response which ignored the fact that while teachers were exasperated by the time and effort it took to complete them, they also found the experience of hands-on evaluation of their students worthwhile. Nonetheless, after the boycott the government decided to focus national tests on core curriculum subjects (reading, math and science) and to only print comparative school score averages for students aged 11 or older.

Consequences of England's National Testing System

Because England's national testing system was delayed by at least one false start, the testing system has not yet produced the long-term data that was intended. However, preliminary results allow the consequences of testing to be compared with many of the original purposes of assessment.

Teachers report that results can be very useful. Having a national yardstick by which to gauge student performance, along with an effective measurement tool, has helped teachers improve their teaching and target instruction to students with particular needs and aptitudes.

Differences in school performance have been highlighted but not decreased. Preliminary evidence suggests that England's national tests, while they provide critical information to direct school improvement, do not empower schools to make necessary improvements. In other words, England has learned that detailed information is a necessary but insufficient instigator of significant school improvement.

Parents have not begun to use results to drive their choice among schools. Parents see measures of school achievement such as test results as only

[2] One should note that in 1992, in the second year of teacher-led tests, the time taken to administer the tests was estimated at half of 1991 levels, in part because teachers were including assessments in instruction more and had streamlined their own processes and procedures.

one of many important variables in selecting a school. Although the government hoped to establish an "educational marketplace" fueled by test score data, parents seem to consider other school characteristics just as important as test scores.

School Accountability: The Office of Standards in Education

Created in the late 1980's, the Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED) is a department of central government in England that commissions independent school inspections. The purpose of these inspections is: 1) to identify strengths and weaknesses in schools (in relation to nationally agreed upon indicators of quality); 2) to improve overall quality of teaching and learning; 3) to raise standards overall; and 4) to give parents detailed information about the educational products of their children's school. Normally, schools are inspected every four years, but the Secretary of Education may mandate inspections of particular schools more frequently.

Inspections are undertaken by teams of about 15 registered inspectors that include representatives from education and at least one member who has no professional experience in education. Teams bid against each other for contracts to inspect schools, and inspections usually last about a week. School reports issued by OFSTED teams document the standards achieved by students overall and in particular subjects, the quality of teaching provided by the staff, the efficiency with which finances are managed, and the contribution the school makes to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Once OFSTED reports are released, schools prepare a development plan to address issues raised in the report.

OFSTED reports are public, so school accountability for responding responsibly and taking seriously their proposed improvement plan is augmented by the fact that they must make the report available to parents and community members. Schools that require significant improvement receive technical assistance and professional support from their LEA.

In general, the work of OFSTED has been well received by schools undergoing inspections, at least in part because the reports evaluate the *whole school program* rather than one component such as student performance. Because of their emphasis on public reporting about whole school quality, OFSTED reports are seen as one of the most effective of England's reforms for addressing both accountability *and* improvement.

The OFSTED inspection system has been greeted with such approval that in September 1997 OFSTED's powers were expanded (notably by a new government led by the Labour party) to include inspecting LEAs. "LEA's must be held publicly accountable for the standard of service they deliver," said David Blunkett, Secretary of Education. "The programme of inspections and published reports will provide vital information on how effective LEAs are in supporting their schools. It will allow comparisons of performance to be made against nationally agreed standards." Similar to schools, LEAs undergoing inspection must develop education development plans (EDPs) describing how they will promote school improvement and including improvement targets that LEAs have negotiated with their individual schools. EDPs are public documents and will form the backbone upon which future OFSTED evaluations stand. Blunkett asserts, "Taken together, OFSTED inspection and the approval of EDPs provide a comprehensive system for LEAs to measure their performance and consider how they can improve quality and provide greater value-for-money."

Consequences of Establishing the Office of Standards in Education.

OFSTED inspections improve school management, teaching and learning. More than most other education reforms, OFSTED evaluations seem to be guiding schools through a *process* of genuine improvement.

OFSTED reports are being used as school marketing tools. In addition to test scores, schools that receive favorable OFSTED reports are using the reports to market their school to prospective parents and students, and the general public is beginning to consider OFSTED reports as useful wide-angle snapshots of school quality.

The OFSTED evaluation process is encouraging long-term planning. Schools now expect to have long-term plans evaluated and scrutinized, and they are required to formulate and work toward long-term school improvement plans that are reasonable but challenging.

Lessons for U.S. Policymakers

England's experiences building a standards and accountability system are both timely and telling for many U.S. state and federal policymakers. Currently, almost every state is creating, implementing or revising a set of standards to define core academic content of what students should "know and be able to do" at key stages of public education. But most policymakers in the United States are still struggling with how to make standards, once established, come to life and become real in every school and every classroom. Several of the lessons learned through the English experience are relevant to the process underway in the U.S.

Lesson 1: Subject standards are most effectively forged when they are forged in concert.

In the English government's first try at creating national standards, the core subject areas of reading, math and science were so detailed and comprehensive that covering these subjects meant that other subjects suffered. Also, subject standards contained no coordinated cross-cutting themes to relate mathematics and science, reading and social studies. In large part, the deficiencies of the standards were because standards were developed in isolation, at different times, and by subject specialists without strong input from classroom teachers. As states in the U.S. develop content standards, the English example suggests that states should consider interdisciplinary standards or encourage those developing individual subject areas to collaborate in order to target interdisciplinary themes and regulate the comparative contents of each subject.

Lesson 2. Raising and even defining academic standards requires the willing and active participation of teachers and school administrators in order to be effective.

In England, the government found it necessary to rewrite their standards and assessments precisely because teachers and administrators felt no sense of ownership of the standards system and found them unwieldy, long-winded and hard to understand. The government learned that if most teachers feel that a program is detrimental to their students, it is virtually impossible to compel teachers to implement it. Problems encountered in England were only resolved by involving teachers substantially in the standards development process. Policymakers in the U.S. can bypass many of the problems encountered in England by actively involving teachers in every component of reform, to build a sense of ownership among educators and prevent misunderstandings farther down the road.

Lesson 3. New assessments need to have ample time to be drafted, piloted and implemented.

The English wasted valuable money and other resources because they initially established a national assessment system at breakneck speed, without proper piloting, evaluation or consultation. What they learned was that "haste makes waste," as they had to go back and re-do their assessments because they were unwieldy, unreliable and invalid. State policymakers in the U.S., as they create statewide assessments to monitor the achievement of their students in terms of standards, need to balance the need for a quick and easy measure of student achievement with issues of quality, accuracy and public acceptance, which can often only be assured through patient and careful planning, piloting and implementation.

Lesson 4. One test can rarely serve multiple goals effectively.

English policymakers also learned that assessments usually do one thing well. Initially, when national tests were teacher-led and performance based, they were excellent for directing student remediation but invalid measures of school-to-school performance. Redesigning the assessments to be primarily multiple choice, the government has now created tests that tell teachers very little about their students' instructional needs but provide highly standardized scores that can be compared across schools. The English example points out to U.S. education policymakers that no one test will do everything well. Consequently, states that have multiple goals for their state assessment system may need to consider prioritizing those goals in terms of assessments or having more than one assessment to serve particular goals.

Lesson 5. High standards are more than just high test scores.

Although the central component of England's standards and accountability system is a set of subject-area standards and related assessments, policymakers in England were careful to construct OFSTED evaluation criteria that emphasized the overall well-being of children, the fiscal responsibility of the school, and the quality of teaching. School improvement plans need to contain not only plans to increase student achievement, but also plans to make the school function more effectively and efficiently. In the U.S., policymakers may want to consider that a comprehensive system of standards may not be measurable simply through an assessment. While high quality schools usually produce good test scores, they also contribute to the healthy and happy development of children, encourage teachers to be innovative and creative, involve parents and the community in innovative ways, and, in general, cultivate environments where children and their families want to be. Evaluating high-quality schools, therefore, requires complex and time-consuming measurement of many factors.

Lesson 6. Standards and assessments do not improve the quality of schools as effectively as long-term evaluation and planning do.

Although English policymakers began by establishing a set of standards and assessments to drive school improvement, over the years the English conception of school improvement has changed to focus on whole school evaluation and long-term planning, with standards and assessments serving as measuring gauges. English policymakers understand that while a set of standards is a necessary component of school improvement, it is not sufficient to direct large-scale school reform. In some states, policymakers have created standards, assessments and sanctions for those who perform poorly. But the English example suggests that school improvement may be more likely if standards and assessments were accompanied by technical assistance teams, long-term evaluation projects and monitored, multi-year improvement plans for schools.

Part III. School Competition and Privatization

In England, a variety of initiatives to privatize schools and services and make schools compete for students were developed as mechanisms to enhance accountability, to guarantee taxpayers "value for money," and to improve schools through "free-market" mechanisms. School competition was fostered both by extending to parents the right to select their child's school and by simultaneously increasing the variety of schools from which to choose by creating new types of schools with varying degrees of autonomy and differing characters. Schools were released from many of the restrictions previously imposed by LEAs and empowered to manage themselves, to select their own priorities, to decide their own characters, and to spend their own money accordingly. The government believed that, like choosing products in a store, parents would "shop" for schools, but only if they could make a meaningful choice among very different schools. Specifically, the English government increased school competition and privatization by establishing policies that:

- Enabled parents to apply for their child to attend any elementary or secondary school in the country and forbid schools to deny students a place unless the school had reached its full capacity;
- Created new types of schools to compete with traditional LEA schools;
- Distributed almost all LEA operating funds to individual schools and allowed schools to "shop" for services that were once provided exclusively by the LEA; and
- Tied school funding directly to the number of students in the school;

The success of the government plan to improve school quality via a "free market" depended upon several factors:

- **Information flowing effectively.** As national tests were administered, the government planned to create "league tables" to rank order schools according to student performance. These tables were intended to enable "informed choice," where parents could effectively judge school quality, give good schools their "business" and eventually drive bad schools to close.
- **Parents taking their choice seriously.** The government undertook a concerted campaign to inform parents of their right to choose a school and encourage them to do so since the success of a market depends on individuals moving their business to support the best products.
- **Schools admitting students to their building capacity.** With declines in student numbers through the previous ten years, LEAs distributed fewer students across the same number of schools. The government feared that many schools, having grown accustomed to roomy quarters, would choose to continue to serve fewer students, artificially diminishing the number of "empty slots" available and reducing competition. As a consequence, the government devised a formula to calculate each school's capacity, and schools were required to admit students until they reached capacity.
- **High quality providers expanding their services.** As in any free market, the supply of student spaces at the most desirable schools would have to expand to serve the demands

of families fleeing failing schools. This would skim even more students from less competitive schools, causing them to close and driving the quality of the whole system upward.

The government's plans to implement a "school market" were contentious and nationally divisive. Many educators and local education authority officials balked at imposing what they thought were ruthless market controls on public service institutions. Specifically, they were concerned with three issues: 1) that some very good, but not easily marketable, schools (such as small schools or schools that worked wonders with particularly challenging children) would lose the competition undeservedly; 2) that "league tables" of assessment results could not adequately reflect the quality of a school, since they would not report the "value added" to students by a school; and 3) that, if popular, schools would be required by the national government to admit more students than they wanted—in a sense, making their job more difficult because they did it well.

School Choice

Although school choice had existed in some regions of England for several years, laws passed in 1988 went much farther, establishing a nationwide market of schools in which parents could "shop" and "vote with their feet" if a school did not suit them. Ideologically, the government believed that market competition was inherently better than government regulation and so they were anxious to improve schools through a market mechanism.

The new school choice system was a key component of the government's education reforms not only on ideological grounds, but also because the government had been concerned for several years with finding a way to close underutilized schools to make the education system more efficient. The 1980's were an opportune time to implement a market-driven system of competition because the school-age

"Extending parents' rights and responsibilities, including their right of choice, will help raise standards by giving them greater influence over education."

Conservative Party
Manifesto, 1979.

population was decreasing, and many schools were underutilized. As a limited number of students applied for positions in more desirable schools, the theory was that poor schools would "go out of business." The stakes of the competition were elevated with government policies that allocated funds to schools almost entirely upon the numbers of students they attracted; schools that failed to attract a critical number of students would not receive funds sufficient to operate. Because of the link between school funding and school choice, the English model has been called a "virtual voucher system" (Sexton, 1987).

Parents, particularly at the secondary level, seemed eager to accept their responsibility to choose. Only a few years after the national system was implemented, some LEAs found that almost half of all students were crossing traditional borders to attend secondary schools in neighboring LEAs. Movement within LEAs was usually even greater than movement across them. Now, it is common for parents to begin shopping for a secondary school a year or two before their child is actually ready to enroll. Parents visit classrooms, collect brochures and school data, and talk to friends, neighbors and colleagues. Most parents believe they have a true, meaningful choice to make among schools (Woods, 1994).

Preliminary Consequences of School Choice in England

The effects of school choice have been mixed. While many of the positive consequences

envisioned by national policymakers have not come about, others have flourished.

Parents are choosing schools more for convenience, character, and pageantry than for measures of academic achievement. As in the U.S., evidence suggests that parents use largely non-academic criteria—such as whether a school is single sex or coeducational, the distance and convenience of a school's location, and the impressiveness of a school's facilities—before they consider measures of achievement. Despite the government's emphasis on published comparative test data for every school, one study found that only 11 percent of parents listed "test scores" among the three most important factors in selecting a school (Woods, 1993).

The best schools are not expanding to meet parental demand. Popular schools do not want to expand, since changing a portion of their "formula for success" may render them less successful. Also, effective headteachers are well aware that there is a point at which increasing size impedes good education. As a consequence, successful schools usually adopt criteria to select their students, since they have more applicants than openings, rather than becoming larger.

Differences in parental choice patterns have surfaced. While a majority of parents from all over the country feel they have genuine choice among schools, the feeling is much higher among urban than among rural parents. Furthermore, those parents who choose to send their child to a school other than their neighborhood school are, in general, more highly educated and have more high-status occupations than parents who send their child to a neighborhood school.

New Types of Schools

Allowing parents to select among schools for their children was an important component of opening schools to the pressures of the marketplace. But increasing the variety of schools from which parents could choose was another, equally important, component of a true educational marketplace. As such, the government passed legislation to create schools with new governance structures and unique missions. Two of the most inventive, and controversial, new types of schools were "grant maintained schools" and "city technology colleges."

Grant Maintained Schools

Any publically funded school in England can leave its LEA and become an independently operating "grant maintained" (GM) school after a successful parental ballot. When parents vote to become grant maintained, ownership of school buildings and grounds passes from the LEA to the school governing body[3]. The governing bodies of grant maintained schools also assume complete responsibility for running the school, including employing staff and contracting for services.

The LEA must turn over to a GM school all money that it would have spent overseeing the school. National government funds, which usually flow through the LEA to schools, are also given directly to a GM school. By taking money from LEA budgets, the grant maintained schools initiative was supposed to create a parallel education system to compete with LEAs, providing more choice to families and making LEAs provide services of higher quality and "value for money" in order to retain schools. The national government envisioned a time when some LEAs would go out of business, as every school became autonomous and contracted with various service providers for resources previously available from the LEA. Schools, on the other hand, released from LEA bureaucracy, would be places where ingenuity, creativity, specialized services, and niche marketing flourish.

The government learned, however, that schools were more satisfied with their LEAs than the government thought. Requests for GM status

[3] A governing body is a board of parents, teachers, local government, community and business representatives who are the primary policymaking body for every school in the country

trickled in, and while some applications were from schools that welcomed the opportunity to "go it alone" many came from schools that had been threatened with closure in LEA reorganization plans. For these schools, becoming GM was a vote for survival rather than a vote for creative freedom. The government was faced with the possibility that it had misread what schools want. For the majority of schools that appreciated their relationship with their LEA and were not slated to close, what was the incentive to become grant maintained?

Because of the GM initiative's sluggish start, the national government began to provide financial incentives for schools to leave their LEA. While the enabling legislation stipulated that GM schools and LEA schools should be treated equally, in fact, GM schools have received not only normal operating and central service funds from their LEA funding formula, but also national grants for staff development, capital improvement and other items. For larger secondary schools, the windfall received from going GM could add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

At least in part because of the cash windfalls that GM schools receive, they tend to be wealthier schools, housed in excellent facilities with the best resources. They also tend to do well in the "educational marketplace." This is one of the biggest issues with GM schools—in relation to LEA schools, financial perks give GM schools an upper hand in the competitive market.

Although the government had visions of overseeing a system entirely comprised of autonomous schools, today there are just over 1,100 GM schools—a small portion of all schools in England. In some LEAs, the number of GM schools is too small to create a "parallel system," but in other areas the numbers are substantial. Significantly, the 1,100 GM schools include about 25 percent of all secondary schools in the country, and over 600,000 students attend GM schools.[4]

Preliminary Outcomes of the Grant Maintained Schools Initiative.

Grant maintained schools are becoming selective. Because GM schools can establish their own admissions and expulsion policies, GM schools often exclude below-average students or those with special needs in favor of more easily educated students. LEA schools cannot readily expel students or deny admission, so troubled students end up disproportionately in LEA schools. As a matter of fact, the rise of expulsions has been one of the most significant changes since the advent of GM schools (Coleman, 1996).

Grant maintained schools are becoming very traditional. Rather than using their bureaucratic freedom to try new things, GM schools tend to follow very traditional models of education, including school uniforms, an emphasis on "classical" course content and non-integrated curricula, and strict discipline policies. Because of the tendency of GM schools to adopt traditional teaching and learning practices rather than experiment with new methods, some contend that GM schools do not substantially increase the variety of schools from which parents can choose.

Grant maintained schools tend to exist in clusters. The disaffection with local government that often causes parents to vote for GM status differs substantially from LEA to LEA, so GM schools tend to exist in clusters. In 1994, 33 LEAs still had no GM schools within their borders, whereas 65 percent of all GM schools were located in only 15 percent of LEAs (Local Schools Information, 1994).

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[4] GM schools have long been politically contentious among political parties other than the Conservatives. Since the Labour party took over Parliament in the spring of 1997, they have worked out a plan to discontinue the process of becoming grant maintained. Their current proposal creates three new classifications of schools: community, foundation and aided. Under the new scheme, most grant maintained schools would become "foundation" schools, which would allow them to keep their autonomy and retain ownership of their property. The biggest difference in Labour's proposed scheme will be that financial preferences for leaving their partnership with their LEA will be discontinued.

Grant maintained schools are creating a new level of bureaucracy. GM schools have not done away with the need for bureaucracy. On the contrary, the government needed to create new government agencies to contend with the particular needs of GM schools. For example, the Funding Agency for Schools (FAS), a national government office, is responsible for overseeing the allocation of funds to GM schools and keeps watch over their policies and planning. In LEAs where most schools are GM, the FAS also ensures that each LEA has sufficient space in their schools to support the surrounding student population. In general, the Department for Education keeps vigilant watch on ways in which GM schools spend public money. Some say that GM schools are not more independent that LEA schools, they simply work under the authority of the national, rather than local, government.

GM Schools feel compelled to disregard the good of their larger community. When schools compete for students and funds, they are deterred from considering how their actions affect the larger community or how regional planning becomes more difficult. Schools often report becoming GM to receive more money to educate their students. Some headteachers lament that their decision to provide for their students causes other local students and schools who remain within the LEA to suffer a demoralizing loss of funds and diminishing quality of service.

Students at GM schools have above average achievement. Although studies suggest that achievement is higher in GM schools, a high proportion of GM schools are selective, and GM schools attract wealthier and higher achieving students than LEA schools, so results are hard to compare. Also, a majority of GM schools are in rural and suburban areas rather than inner cities, where exam results tend to be lowest.

Morale among staff, parents and students is very high at GM schools. GM schools have very high morale, and there is a sense of pride among governors, staff, parents and students. Studies suggest this is because operating autonomously gives everyone more sense of ownership and responsibility of the school's successes.

> *"Schools find themselves in an invidious position — caught between a narrow self-interest in resources and broader concerns about the community at large."*
>
> Roy Pryke, Chief Education Officer, Kent County Council (in Stearns, 1996)

City Technology Colleges

City Technology Colleges (CTCs) are schools that are established through innovative partnerships between the government and private sector sponsors. They are supposed to cater to primarily urban students of all abilities, and they must place special emphasis on science and technology. Business and industry are supposed to be closely involved in the funding and construction of the schools. They are also supposed to play active roles in the governance of the school and in offering curricular opportunities, in addition to the National Curriculum (NC), that will prepare graduates to succeed in science and technology industries. Like GM schools, CTCs are owned and managed by their governing boards. CTCs were intended to rejuvenate inner-city youth through high quality education for work.

Currently, there are fifteen city technology colleges scattered across urban areas in England, most of which are very successful in terms of number of applicants and satisfaction among students and staff. Since CTCs have as their charge a concentration on the world of work in science and technology, they are forging new options for students that combine vocational and academic studies with work-place environments. At CTCs, students enter sleek, well-equipped office environments. They are encouraged to view their schooling as "employment." Com-

monly, students at CTCs begin their work earlier than students at other schools and work well into the evening. Taking good advantage of their well-cultivated industrial ties, CTCs usually have cross-disciplinary and business-focused curricula that include work placements and courses taught by industry representatives.

Although established to serve students of varying abilities, CTCs are becoming, by virtue of their popularity, competitive institutions. They are usually so oversubscribed that the student selection process can be quite rigorous. Inner-city students that are most in need of work-place skills and engaging education, then, are rarely admitted to CTCs. In fact, they rarely apply, since CTCs have popular reputations.

Although the government hoped to attract business and industry to be long-term financial partners in CTCs, this has not been the case. In the end, although about 200 businesses gave $55 million, the government had to pick up 80 percent of the cost of construction, and the high expenditures involved in constructing and operating such technology-intensive schools forced the program establishing new schools to end in 1993. CTCs already in existence before 1993 continue to operate.

Outcomes of the CTC Initiative

Academic results are mixed and hard to interpret. In 1994, one-third of all CTCs had exam scores below the national average. But since the population of students in CTCs is not average (inner-city youth with an interest in science and technology who demonstrate particular knowledge or aptitude to succeed at a CTC), it is impossible to gauge if these exam results are better or worse than how the students would perform if they were not in a CTC. Regardless of test scores, however, students who attend CTCs are usually very satisfied; truancy rates are low, and students commonly put in longer hours at a CTC than do their peers at other types of schools.

CTCs have encouraged other schools to investigate productive partnerships with business and industry. CTCs provide models of corporate partnership that other schools are looking to emulate. Once unheard of in English schools, some LEA and GM schools are finding corporate sponsors to boost their image as "technology schools." Based on the partnerships forged between industry and CTCs, the government has created a program to encourage other schools to seek partnerships. At present, about 50 secondary schools have raised considerable funds from private industry, which are then matched by the national government, to finance new computer facilities.

CTCs have increased inequities among schools. At least in part because of their close relationships with industry, CTCs, like GM schools, are better off financially than LEA schools. The government, wanting to cultivate CTCs, invested millions of dollars into the construction of each CTC as well as establishing the City Technology College Trust, a government organization that worked full-time to cultivate relationships with industry and encourage them to donate generously to the CTC effort. The relationships have paid off, affording CTCs facilities far beyond the reach of other schools.

Business and industry have not made good long-term, systemic partners. Although CTCs have benefitted in innumerable ways from relationships with business and industry, contributions from the private sector never materialized in ways that the government envisioned. A handful of corporations have taken long-term interest in CTCs, but most companies have not been willing to engage systematically in the support and operation of schools. The English have learned that while business and industry can be good partners for education, an effort to engage them systemically and over the long term is likely to fail.

Local Management of Schools in England

Although England, like the United States, had a long history of district control of public schools, Parliament in 1988 shifted almost all decisionmaking responsibilities from regional districts to tens of thousands of school governing bodies and their headteachers. While CTCs and GM schools were already created as autonomous schools, the government felt that all schools, even those that remain within the LEA, would benefit from less regional bureaucracy and more autonomy. At the moment, all schools in England have measurably more autonomy than ten years ago, and all schools in England have more self-control than most schools in the U.S., including many charter schools (Whitty, 1996). School governing bodies, headteachers and management teams now take care of virtually all budget, admissions, hiring, and other management issues involved in running schools. This shift from regional to school-based policymaking is called "local management of schools" (LMS).

The national government implemented LMS for three overarching reasons: *politically* because LEAs had a reputation for being politically liberal and the conservative government of the time wanted to break their stronghold over local schools; *ideologically*, the government believed that parents and business representatives on governing bodies could be more responsive to school and local community needs than could larger political bodies; and *fiscally*, the government believed that local management would compel headteachers and governing bodies to pay more attention to the costs associated with education. In the government's own words, "Effective schemes of local management will enable governing bodies and headteachers to plan their use of resources, including their most valuable resource, their staff, to maximum effect in accordance with their own needs and priorities, and to make schools more responsive to their clients—parents, pupils, the local community and employers" (Department for Education and Science, 1988).

"Self government is not an end in itself. It is about raising standards by making schools more accountable for their performance and giving them more power to improve it. The aim is to release the energy and enthusiasm of governors, heads and staff... But this won't happen unless they really believe that responsibility for improving the school's performance lies with them. In some areas, achieving this means breaking down a culture of dependency on the LEA...(The LEAs) role must be that of enabler, not controller."

Gillian Shephard, Education and Employment Secretary, January, 1997

To transfer responsibility from LEAs to schools in such a way as to disempower regional bureaucracy while building free-market competition among schools, the government stipulated that LEAs must distribute at least 85 percent of their general budget to schools, leaving no more than 15 percent of the budget for central administration. When a school becomes GM, funds to support central administration must also be distributed to the school. Consequently LEAs are strapped for funds and finding it difficult to retain a high level of service. To earn money, many LEAs are securing contracts with schools for services they previously provided as a matter of course.

Furthermore, at least 80 percent of the money distributed to schools must be distributed according to raw student numbers, with the other 20 percent allocated according to special criteria such as an above average percent of at-risk or special education students. This formula has fallen under criticism because it deters schools from catering to students with special needs, who

may cost more to educate than 20 percent above the average student. Not only does the resource allocation formula minimize the extent to which schools can be compensated for educating "expensive" students and penalize schools that are not operating with full enrollment, but the formula also disregards actual teachers' salaries and other staffing costs. Some schools with particularly experienced staff find they have almost no money for materials or operating expenses after they pay their staff salaries.

Consequences of Local Management of Schools

At this point, most agree that local management in England has been largely a good thing and has achieved many of its intended purposes. Headteachers have become entrepreneurial, and, perhaps more telling, they report high levels of job satisfaction under LMS. Headteachers feel invigorated by their newfound ability to put their educational visions into practice, to respond quickly and decisively in decisionmaking and to work under their own institutional priorities. But LMS is not a cure for bad management, bad teaching, or underachievement and makes the success of a school heavily dependent on a savvy headteacher and governors. Most importantly, per capita funding has not yet shut down many schools that are struggling. They have, for the most part, continued to struggle even more under LMS.

Headteachers focus more on management, less on education. Headteachers report that staff meetings are much more focused on peripheral administrative, rather than core educational, issues under LMS. Relatedly, headteachers feel more distanced from their staff, as their day is consumed with management, rather than educational, priorities. Whereas headteachers used to be *educational* leaders, now they lead management teams. Particularly in schools with tight budgets, financial problems are eclipsing education concerns (Stearns, 1996).

Some LEAs, strapped for funds, have been rendered less effective. LEAs that become cash poor, particularly when many schools become GM, are less able to provide high-quality, competitively-priced services to the few schools left under their jurisdiction. There is often a domino effect where, as LEAs become poorer, more and more schools leave in order to get more money via GM status. Although many LEAs are struggling to continue to provide services to the schools that depend upon them, no LEA has "gone out of business" as the government expected.

There is no evidence linking financial delegation to improved student achievement. Although there is general consensus that LMS has enhanced cost efficiency and better use of resources, there is no clear evidence that achievement has improved as a result of LMS (Levacic, 1995). Indicators that LMS has raised achievement come primarily from schools that had an increase in funding under LMS and applied those funds to instruction rather than operating costs. Research in the U.S. has come to similar conclusions: passing funds down to the instructional context leads to tangible improvements in student performance, but school based management per se has no effect (Cooper, 1994).

Divisions among struggling and successful schools have grown larger. Because the formula by which funds are distributed to individual schools strongly favors popular schools and hurts less popular ones, the divide between well-endowed schools and those that are struggling is getting larger (Wallace, ed., 1993).

Students with special needs have become an albatross to schools. When money follows a child as in England, schools try not to incur extra costs by admitting students that may be costly to educate. Where there are more applicants than there are places, popular schools can find ways and reasons to discourage or exclude students that governors feel will be trouble. Although students can appeal if they feel they have been unfairly excluded from a school, the process can be time-consuming. Increasingly, these students end up in less desirable schools.

More money is being spent on instruction. Under LMS, schools have substantial flexibility to spend money in ways that suit them. In general, schools are using this flexibility to spend a greater percentage of their total budget on books, computers and materials and less on operating costs such as utility bills, than they did under LEA control (Department for Education, 1993).

The social welfare role of the LEA is becoming harder to satisfy. While most agree that becoming aware of market forces and being compelled to sell the services they provide has led LEAs to streamline and improve their services, many also worry that the social welfare role of LEAs—ensuring that every child had a place in school, that students with special needs receive the education they need, that teachers receive the support and technical assistance they need and that every school has certain capabilities, materials and facilities—is lost now that schools operate autonomously and LEAs are left pursuing schools' patronage rather than monitoring them. Conceptions of "community" often stop now at the school door; school autonomy, many would say, is good, but so is the social welfare role of the LEA and a sense of larger community service.

Governors have not become the "watchdogs" that the government envisioned. Rather than policing schools, governors are usually their greatest supporters. For good reason, governors have been called the "sleeping giants" of education reform in England. In no small part this is because while the government hoped to use governors as a form of popular pressure to compel schools to do some things differently, quite the opposite effect has also been apparent. Governors staunchly support "their" school and, when required to side with their school or with the national government (as they were during a national teachers' strike or as some have had to do in response to what they thought were inaccurate OFSTED reports) governors almost invariably become school advocates rather than school change agents.

Lessons Learned

In the United States, various mechanisms to encourage schools to compete have been devised, most notably experiments in charter schools, vouchers, and public school choice systems that often include magnets and other specialty schools. Although a minority of schools in the U.S. compete in an "education market," what was once considered daring now occupies a relatively mainstream position among reform strategies. In fact, reforms that allow families to choose from a variety of schools, such as choice, charter school and voucher schemes, are among the most popular school restructuring reforms in the United States (Newmann, 1993).

School-based management is also popular in the United States. Some efforts have gotten particular press, such as the devolution of decisionmaking authority to schools in Chicago, or the Kentucky Education Reform Act stipulation that all schools have their own governing council to make decisions on such important issues as budget, curriculum and staffing.

But England's model of school choice, vouchers and local management exists on a larger scale than anything in the United States. What can we in the U.S. learn from their expansive experiment?

Lesson 1. Parental Choice is not a panacea.

While choice in England raised parental interest in schools, it has also caused more inequality of opportunity, as children's opportunities are determined by parents' choices rather than solely upon students' aptitudes. Choice policies, without appropriate controls and safeguards, tend to empower advantaged parents and advantaged schools at the expense of the less advantaged. Large-scale school choice schemes are also difficult to implement evenly, since the ability of parents to secure a place at their first-choice school will be likely to vary considerably across geographic areas. Finally, the English example points out that school choice may not

be an effective way to encourage school improvement, since parents frequently select schools for reasons besides quality.

Lesson 2. Encouraging schools to be almost entirely self-governing and autonomous threatens community and regional planning and makes it difficult to ensure that every student receives an appropriate education.

English schools have found considerable benefit to being self-governing. Morale often increases, and limited funds are more quickly targeted to more appropriate expenses. However, encouraging schools to be self-governing has made it very difficult for LEAs to perform their social justice role of ensuring that every child is provided an appropriate education at a suitable state-funded school. In the U.S., states are also struggling with ways to ensure that giving schools freedom does not lower quality or diminish the chances of every child receiving an appropriate education. Increasing the number of schools that are self-governing, without putting in place mechanisms to monitor or regulate their operation, may lead to more, rather than fewer, students receiving inadequate educations.

Lesson 3. Business and industry, while helpful partners in education, may not be expected to invest extensively and over the long term in the nuts and bolts of education.

In England, the extensive, long-term investment expected from business and industry into school reform did not materialize. While industry was willing to contribute funds for specific projects and programs, experience demonstrated that they were not willing to do so long-term; nor were they particularly willing to enter into partnerships in school governance and policymaking. In the United States, local districts have successfully forged partnerships with industry to upgrade technology, create school-to-work experiences, and other targeted programs and projects. The English example points out, however, that this may be the limit of what business and industry can be expected to provide schools.

Lesson 4. Per capita funding paired with school choice can place schools in ruthless competition to gain advantage for the small sector of students they serve at the potential expense of other students.

Putting schools in a competitive system encourages schools to act on behalf of their own students, rather than on behalf of the community, the district, or the nation. In England, local policymakers readily admit that competing for students almost requires them to act in ways that ensure their success and, if necessary, ensure that schools in their vicinity are less successful. In the U.S. policymakers may need to think creatively about ways to encourage competition and excellence without compromising the greater public good that state-funded schools are supposed to serve.

Lesson 5. Under a simple voucher scheme that pairs parental choice with a basic per capita funding formula, schools can become poor for reasons other than quality.

A basic premise of advocates of free-markets among schools and voucher programs is that parents will choose to send their children to better schools, and bad schools will be forced out of business. But evidence in England, as well as some evidence from studies of local school choice programs in the U.S., shows that parents choose schools for a variety of reasons and that school quality is rarely the most important determinant of parental choice. Consequently, schools in free markets do not fail simply because they have bad academic programs — schools in less-desirable geographic locations, schools with older or less-attractive facilities, or schools with few extra-curricular activities may find it difficult to attract a full class of students, even if their academic programs are exemplary. Education policymakers should consider that, while school choice and per capita funding schemes may benefit schools in other ways, evidence suggests that, in themselves, they do not improve schools. Schools seem to serve their public best when they collaborate.

Part IV. Conclusions

English education policymakers have tackled difficult questions in the past decade and devised a new framework for schools that replaces a social democratic education system with a competitive, market-oriented model. The paradoxical result of these reforms has been a greatly expanded education role for the central government, more local control over individual schools, which have grown more diverse, and a greatly diminished role for LEAs. These reforms have also increased opportunity, while also increasing inequality, among schoolchildren.

Any study of English reforms raises more questions that it answers.

- How can policymakers foster competition without jeopardizing important school collaboration?
- What is the best way to engage parents in meaningful choice?
- What mechanisms can help to equally distribute school choice options among parents and communities?
- How can business and industry become involved in schools in new ways?
- How is school quality best defined and evaluated?
- How can free-market economic models most appropriately be applied to public services?
- Is it best for policymakers to force bad schools to close or compel them to improve?

In England, as in the United States, strides forward in school reform and improvement have yet to resolve many pressing questions about how to make schools better.

But England has experienced some notable, and sometimes unanticipated, successes from many of their bold reforms. Teachers, parents, administrators, policymakers and political parties are generally in favor of the reforms in England, and public opinion of schools has improved markedly since the advent of reform in the 1980s. Even though there is scant evidence that national standards, new types of schools, local financial management, or school choice in themselves raise standards, people agree that something good has come from English school reforms: a renewed vigor to improve schools and think beyond the status quo to devise genuinely good schools operating under effective policies.

Overall, what can U.S. policymakers learn from looking at the experiences of England?

- Effective school reforms need ample time to be drafted, piloted, and implemented and need to be based on clear and prioritized goals. Relatedly, wide sweeping change can take time, and hurrying can be counterproductive.
- Policies need to be regularly reviewed and evaluated and, if a policy is failing, policymakers should not hesitate to revise it.
- Financial delegation to individual schools can allow schools to very effectively develop the resources they need.
- School improvement is not the particular responsibility of teachers, parents or policymakers. Rather, systemic change in the way schools operate may need to stem from a large-scale willingness to "think outside the box" and to welcome a sea change in perception among all stakeholders.
- The most effective school improvement policies may be those that include comprehensive whole-school evaluation and strategic planning in addition to state standards and student assessments.

- Good educational policies are those that are based in good research and knowledge about what makes high quality schools rather than based on political expediency or ideology.

- Forging education policies in partnership with teachers, administrators, the general public and lay and professional policymakers at all levels, while inefficient in the short term, may be more expedient in the long term because everyone feels they own some portion of the resulting policy and are invested in its success.

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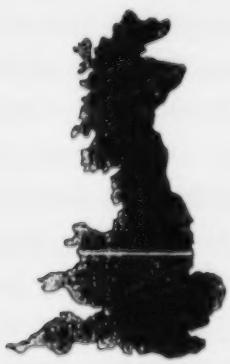

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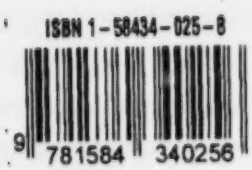

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